



CITY OF MERIDEN
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

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CHRISTIAN BOURDON

DIRECTOR
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February 2, 2023

TO: Connecticut General Assembly
ATTN: Committee on Children

RE: HB 6574 - Act Concerning Municipal Youth Camps

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to you regarding the impact HB 6574 will have on the City of Meriden's Summer Playground Program. While I understand the intention behind the new regulations we feel that there will be severe unintended consequences for parents and our departments. For over twenty years, Meriden Parks and Recreation has run a successful seven week program for less than \$35.00 per week per child. Here are the issues we see with this proposed legislation:

- Each summer 200-plus children in our program enjoy field trips and are fed a healthy breakfast, snack and lunch five days a week through our partnership with the Meriden Board of Education. Food insecurity in communities like Meriden is at an all time high. Sixty percent of Meriden families receive SNAP or **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** assistance. Through our long running program we are able to provide proper nutrition throughout the summer while also providing an affordable solution to our lower income community. In addition, we understand extra SNAP benefits are ending as of March 2023. It is crucial now more than ever for the children of Meriden to have a consistent food source.
- As a municipality, we already utilize our own legal department and HR department that cover many of the concerns being addressed by this new proposed legislation. We follow strict guidelines regarding hiring and background checks. Our checks and balances are already in place. The City of Meriden conducts background checks on ALL Summer Playground Staff. Our view is the added time and expense of additional background checks by the OEC would create increased delays in the hiring process as well as added costs.

- We have long established standard operating procedures for managing Medical Administration. The Meriden Health Department oversees training, and enforces strict guidelines in regards to paperwork, medication administration, and disposal.
- We are concerned the cost of being forced to become a state certified camp will not only have drastic financial implications, but will negatively impact our ability to serve our customers in a flexible fashion. Parents and grandparents who have custody of their children often come to us after our summer program has started, or in the middle of our program, frantic. They do not have the means nor the resources to send their grandchildren to expensive private camps. Fortunately, today with our established procedures we have the ability to accept children at the last minute and even up to the last week of our program. We take pride in having the ability to make decisions quickly based on individual family needs.
- The burden of the proposed cost implications will likely shut down our program. If we are forced to close, parents will not flock to private camps. In many cases, children will essentially be left at home unattended while their caretakers work. If children are left unattended, this unsafe environment will no doubt add an unnecessary strain on our health services and police force of Meriden. We cannot put a price on the potential negative consequences of such a situation.

In closing, the Meriden Summer Playground Program, as well as all municipal programs, offer a low cost, safe, and healthy outlet for our youth the entire summer while also supporting nutritional needs. Please allow us to continue the life-impacting services we provide to our youth and teens.

Thank You for your Consideration!

Kathy Matula -TRD



Recreation Coordinator

CPR, AED & First Aid Trainer

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